



THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL

Headteacher : P J Hurst, BA, MA, MBA, NPQH

Saxtead Road, Framlingham,
Suffolk, IP13 9HE
Telephone : 01728 723493

Email: inmail@thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk
Website: www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk

Dear Parents

12th March 2021

Headteacher's Update 2020/2021 – Letter 22 (of 22)

I thought you would appreciate an update following the return of students to school this week. All things considered, it has gone very well. About 98% of families consented to the LFD testing. The tests have been administered extremely efficiently. My thanks to everyone involved for your help here.

Student attendance has also been very high – just under 98% today. Yesterday, Year 8 achieved 100% attendance in the morning. The overall figure this week has been 97.3%. This is an excellent achievement and is a reminder that excellent attendance does have a significant and positive impact upon educational outcomes.

It's been lovely seeing the students return. As always, I enjoy my interactions with them and, collectively, I find them astute, good humoured, sensible, and just wonderful! We will do the best for them; they deserve no less.

Awarding of Qualifications in Summer 2021

Although this item is principally of interest for Year 11, Year 13, and some Year 12 courses, I think it is useful that the school community are aware of the arrangements for the awarding of qualifications this summer.

Further information from the Government is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2021/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2021>

Mr Ward and Mr Cann have been leading the school's response and more details are provided here:

<https://www.thomasmills.suffolk.sch.uk/public/files/awarding-gcse-qualifications-in-summer-2021-21312122410.pdf>

The school document outlines the basic principles, responsibilities, nature of the evidence and a quality assurance process.

We know our students well and so we are confident that they will continue to make progress. Grades will be determined by evidence from the duration of the course. Evidence could include 'mini-assessments' provided by the Examination Boards and as we understand it, they are not meant to replicate 'formal examinations'. Next week Mr Cann and Mr Ward will speak to Year 13 and Year 11 respectively so that information can be shared and hopefully anxieties allayed.

It is in everyone's interests that the process is fair and robust.

I very much hope that using a range of evidence to inform qualification grades becomes future standard practice from this point and I will write to the Department for Education and OFQUAL at the first opportunity. However, at this moment in time, there has not been any communication about examinations in 2022.

We wish all our examination years well. During the recent lockdown they 'kept up' well with their learning. I know that they will keep engaging with their learning so as to maximise their progress.

Lateral Flow Device (LFD) - Home Testing

You will recall from my Update Letter (20) that there are two types of tests -LFD and PCR. It's the LFD tests that have been undertaken in school and soon, at home.



For the week beginning Monday 22nd March, students will be supplied with LFD test kits to self-swab and test themselves twice a week at home. The points below are taken from Government Guidance and further details can be shared with you next week.

Staff and students should report their result to NHS Test and Trace as soon as the test is completed either online, by telephone, or as per the instructions in the kit. Staff and students should also share their result with the school to help with contact tracing.

The Government has said that all positive results from rapid tests undertaken at home do need to be confirmed with a standard PCR test. This is because these tests are not conducted in a controlled environment and will not have trained staff on hand. Following a positive LFD test at home, a confirmatory PCR test should be booked online or by calling 119. Whilst awaiting the PCR test result, a student and their close contacts should self-isolate. If the PCR test is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD (at home only) and so a student can return to school.

Mrs Mitchell is developing a Microsoft form that can be used for reporting results.

The requirement to undertake a PCR test following a positive LFD test is new, as currently, if a student were to test positive for an LFD test in school, they would be required to self-isolate. There is an obvious discrepancy here and this is being discussed in the media, but we will cross this bridge if, and when, we come to it.

School Calendar and Parents' Evenings

Thursday 18th March – Year 9 (online) Parents' Evening

Thursday 25th March – Year 8 (online) Parents' Evening

We have had very positive feedback about the online Parents' Evenings, and we will certainly consider the benefits of the online approach, alongside some face to face contact, for the way ahead.

Summary

As I said at the beginning of this letter, it has been lovely seeing the students return to the school. It will take some time for the usual school routines to settle down again and we are continually assessing the academic, as well as the pastoral and social needs.

Interest in the school remains strong both with regards to future Year Seven entry and the Sixth Form. I am pleased that so many families are aware of the distinctive features of the school as well as the opportunities for good academic and personal development.

This is also true for staff recruitment. At the end of the Summer Term we will be sorry to say good-bye to some long serving members of staff. However, the quality of the applications received has been extremely high. I am confident that we are appointing staff of the highest calibre. It does seem that we are also benefitting from being a stand-alone academy, where 'head office' is very much situated within the school and, more widely, there is a good community focus with high aspirations.

As you can see, there are lots of positives and this was the theme with the valuable time that tutors spent with their form groups this week. Many groups looked at positive things during lockdown and I liked some of these ideas from 8MHE/MRO:

- Just one smile can make someone's day;
- I love to go for walks now because they make me feel free;
- I drew a flower because I think it's positive to see one blooming in the garden.

Thank you 8MHE/MRO - what a great way to start the weekend!

Yours sincerely



P J Hurst
Headteacher